

Regional Education Hubs— Rhetoric or Reality

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Internationalization has not only transformed higher education in three decades but it has undergone major changes itself. This is especially true for cross-border education. Recently, cross-border education has grown in scope and scale with competition and commercialization becoming critical drivers. The numbers of branch campuses, double-degree programs, and franchise and twinning arrangements have increased as well as the recruitment campaigns for international students and faculty. The most recent development is the race to create successful and competitive regional education hubs.

The concept of hub is currently very popular—almost trendy. Countries are trying to position themselves as hubs for finance, communication, transportation, manufacturing, fashion, and education. Cities are doing the same thing. But to date, a regional education hub does not include a definition, requirements, even characteristics, or an assessment of what makes a hub successful and sustainable. Education hub is a label being used to describe a number of new and very different initiatives by countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia that are trying to position themselves as regional centers of excellence in education.

Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, created Knowledge Village in 2003 and more recently the Dubai International Education City. These linked initiatives aim to attract foreign branch campuses to offer education and training to international students who will be job ready for the burgeoning service and knowledge economy in the Gulf states. Foreign education institutions and companies are colocated in an economic free zone with attractive financial and tax benefits. Qatar has taken a different approach, inviting and sponsoring six American institutions and one UK university to offer their full-degree programs and qualifications to Qatari students and regional students. The project is totally financed by the Qatar Foundation and thus is a model difficult to replicate, but it aims to position Qatar as a regional source of high-quality education and to help prepare the country and region for a knowledge-oriented society and economy. The Global School House Project in Singapore is well known and has attracted a number of foreign universities and international students in order to position itself as a regional education hub for both education and research. Malaysia, Hong Kong, Bahrain, and Botswana have declared their aspirations and plans to be regional educa-

tion hubs and have set ambitious goals for international student recruitment.

CATEGORIES OF HUBS

These initiatives have some commonalities but also differ significantly in goals, rationales, sponsors, and activities. The generic term *regional education hub* does not recognize their different approaches and objectives and thus needs to be broken down into three different categories.

The *student hub* is the most focused and prevalent type of education hub. The key aspect is the recruitment of international students to the country for the purposes of internationalization of domestic higher education institutions, revenue generation, and building an international profile. In this scenario it is primarily local higher education institutions that are recruiting the students to their individual campus, although in some cases foreign branch campuses are involved. A national recruitment strategy and requisite policies are in place, but for the most part individual institutions are recruiting students to their own campus and programs. The goal is to reach a national targeted number of international students and to build a reputation as a welcoming place for international students to get a high-quality education.

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The *education and training hub* differs from a student hub in that more than international students are being recruited, with the involvement of different rationales and expectations. Foreign universities are invited to set up satellite operations in the form of teaching centers or branch campuses. International private training and education companies are also encouraged to offer academic programs and professional development opportunities aimed at international and national students. The driving key objectives are to educate and train students to be skilled labor or knowledge workers for domestic and regional companies, to provide increased access to education and training for both international and domestic students and locally based employees, to demonstrate “best educational practice” by foreign education institutions, and to establish geopolitical status in the region. In some cases, the majority of education and training institutions and companies are located in one geographic area to share facilities and promote collaboration among themselves and with industry.

The *knowledge and innovation hub* broadens its mandate beyond education and training to include the production and distribution of knowledge and innovation. Foreign research institutes and companies with major research and develop-

ment activities are also encouraged to establish a base in the country and to collaborate with foreign and local universities and training companies to create a critical mass of talent and expertise. The primary objectives are to help build a knowledge- and service-based economy, to educate and train skilled labor, to attract foreign direct investment, and to increase regional economic competitiveness. Collaboration among the key players—foreign and local industries, research centers, education institutions, and companies—is a key factor to building a knowledge and innovation hub.

PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OR QUANTUM LEAP

A preliminary look at their stated rationales and planned or existing activities shows that the majority of the seven countries (Qatar is the exception) make the recruitment of international students a central feature of their efforts. Ambitious targets, and in some countries major policy changes, are in place to drive the process of becoming a regional student hub. Four countries—United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Malaysia, and Singapore—have attracted a substantial number of foreign universities or companies to provide increased access to education and training for local and international students.

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But this line of thinking presumes a progressive growth from student hub to education and training hub to knowledge and innovation hub; this may be a limited view or incorrect assumption. Is it possible to leap frog from a student hub to a knowledge hub, or is it feasible to start from the get-go as a knowledge and innovation hub? From an education perspective, it is safe to say that no countries currently function as a knowledge hub, although perhaps an economist or trade specialist would have a different view.

Regional education hubs are important new developments, but are they just a fad? Are they more rhetoric than reality? Probably not, but to make education hubs achieve their goals and be sustainable requires substantial planning; policy preparedness; physical, technological, and human infrastructure; and investment by the sponsoring countries. *Education hub* should not be merely a self-subscribed label used to achieve economic or geopolitical advantage in the region. With too much at stake, further work is needed in analyzing this complex and important new development in cross-border education. ■

UK University Governance Under Stress

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University governance provides the essential framework within which teaching and research take place. In the United Kingdom, with its historic tradition of university self-government, governance issues have mostly been concentrated around questions of internal academic and student representation in decision taking. However, with an expending system that consumes an increasing level of state resources, the growing interest of the state in universities' economic contribution and in institutional financial accountability has led to a parallel growth in state interest in university governance processes. Nevertheless, university governance has rarely attracted much public or media attention. The technical (though important) differences between the traditional constitutions of the pre-1992 universities with their commitment to "shared" governance between the council (the governing body) and the senate and the dominance of the board (the governing body) and the chief executive (the vice-chancellor) in the post-1992 constitutions have been obscured by the increasing tendency of the pre-1992 universities. The pre-1992 universities have followed the lead of the post-1992 in adopting a more managerial style—appointing rather than electing deans and giving them executive powers and devolved budgets, appointing full-time pro-vice-chancellors with line-management responsibilities, creating senior management teams to run the university—so that to the external eye the two types of constitution seem to be moving in the same direction.

STRENGTHENING LAY GOVERNANCE

This movement has been coincident with the emergence of the Committee of University Chairmen (CUC) (of governing bodies) as a significant force in university governance. First established in 1987 toward making university chairs better informed about university business and as a potentially powerful lobby over funding issues in relation to a Tory government, the CUC was drawn into offering advice on university governance in the mid-1990s. The evidence of governance malpractice, mainly at governing body level, was revealed in a small number of post-1992 universities and colleges. Successive governments, Tory and Labour, have encouraged the view that lay governance is likely to render greater accountability than academic self-governance and may be more sympathetic to an